

## Manju Kapoor And Her Portrayal of Indian Life

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**Abstract :** *As a literary artist, Manju Kapoor can be put in the category of Jane Austen, Khushwant Singh, Namita Gokhale, Jhumpa Lahiri, Githa Hariharan, Shobha De, Nargis Dalal etc. She confirms the fact that Indian women novelists have a lot of valid facts to express about Indian society. They exist for something noble, sublime, decent, cultured and civilized. Like Jane Austen, Manju Kapoor stays within her limited range and never feels tempted to enter the utopian world of fairies, ghosts and demons and hence can't be ranked with Horace Walpole, Maria Edgeworth, Ann Radcliffe etc. There are no melodramatic scenes in her novels. Like Shakespeare and Milton, she concentrates upon human nature. As she had studied in Dalhousie University, Halifax, she got a chance to observe the people of Canada from different angles. Since she was interested with Canadian students, she knew their passions, ambitions and feelings.*

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Young students of the university had little interest in Christ, Church and *The Bible* and were often confused regarding the aim of life. Most of them studied various subjects to get higher education so that they may be fit for jobs. In her times, Disco theatres, bowling-alley, T.V., baseball, night-club etc. had become popular in Canada too. Parents could not check the movements of their young children and the latter did whatever they liked. Quite often they were punished for rash driving while drunk. At times they were found throwing empty bottles of beer and whisky from their moving cars. When Manju Kapoor was young, she read in the papers that many young Canadian students forcibly raped the girls of their classes. Only a few students were interested in reading standard books and hence got jobs as Salesman or Sales-Representative. As industries flourished towards the end of 20<sup>th</sup> century in Canada, there were many employment opportunities. At times the unemployed young men and women got some stipend from the government to survive. However, the people had a sense of adventure. All these tendencies have been painted by Manju Kapoor in her novels.

She felt encouraged to write the second novel *A Married Woman* as her first novel *Difficult Daughters* (1998) got wonderful success in India and abroad. She got Commonwealth Prize for it as it keeps the readers in her grip from the beginning till the end. As a matter of fact, she knows the art of narration and does not want to increase the length of the novel just for the sake of money. *David Copperfield*, written by great novelist Charles Dickens is the lengthy novel with nearly 900 pages. Similarly, Henry Fielding wrote a lengthy novel *Tom Jones* in two volumes having 1200 pages. How can the reader remember more than 89 characters that Dickens introduces in *David Copperfield*? It is not so in his *Great Expectations* where all the incidents are related with the main theme. Manju Kapoor has all the incidents in her mind as she does not introduce any superfluous incident or character. All the characters have their proper existence in the texture of the novel.

Like traditional Indian women, Manju Kapoor concentrates upon the family life of middle class people with definite questions in her mind such as – Why do the people suffer? Do they study *The Bhagwadgita* for getting peace? Why are they worried about the future of their children? Why do they plan again and again for profits in business? Are they aware of the economic changes taking place in the world economy? Can they relate daily business with the economic policies of Reserve Bank of India and the International Monetary Fund? Do these small traders know the wicked working of NIFTY, SENSEX and Share Markets? Perhaps not. They are just puppets in the hands of world traders and national capitalists. Of course, their socio-economic struggles are well-known to her and hence she successfully

narrates them realistically in her novels. The facts and figures of family life as given by her are true as they are results of her sharp sense of observation. It is true that she does not paint the Share Market of India as Shobha De does in her novels. She does not describe the problems of capitalists that sink with the sinking of Share Market.

In the novel *Difficult Daughters*, Manju Kapoor concentrates upon the problems created by the partition of India in two nations. A lot of Hindu lost their home, shops, property, fields etc. in Pakistan as they were asked to leave their native land. There was no end to their agony when they started their journey for an unknown land. A lot of Hindu families were looted and killed on their way to India. Similarly, a lot of Indian Muslims left India in agony and there was none to sympathize with them. Here the artist is objective and secular. Above all she is a humanist, with milk of kindness in her heart. Many trains full of dead bodies reached Bagha Railway Station and similarly a lot of dead bodies (of Muslims) reached Lahore railway station. Like Chaman Nahal, Khushwant Singh etc., she has realistically described the miseries of innocent people. After the freedom of India, Virmati has to work hard for the survival of the family. She wanted to get education when it was denied to women. In the college, she felt attracted towards Prof. Harish though he was a married man. He loved her as he had no feelings for uneducated and ill-mannered wife Ganga. But the artist describes the concept of New Indian Woman who wanted to be just, wise, free and independent. Virmati left for Lahore. Here her room partner Swarn Lata exposed her to wider canvas of life – Look beyond the limited four walls of the house and see life from every angle. Now, Indian freedom struggle was in full swing and Virmati feels interested in the slogan of national freedom. After all, Indians had a right to be free from the clutches of British Empire. The word Emancipation appeals her mind and like Sarojni Naidu, she joins the freedom struggle. She knew the contribution of R.N. Tagore, B.C. Chatterjee, Surendra Nath Banerjee, Lokmanya Balganga Dhar Tilak, Gopal Krishna Gokhle, Lala Lajpat Rai, M.K. Gandhi, C.R. Das, Pt. J.L. Nehru etc. to freedom movement.

As Virmati was a volunteer for freedom movement, she felt shocked and bewildered with the arrival of Prof. Harish. She was busy and engaged and yet could not resist against the Professor. At Nahan, she feels disturbed with the fear of pregnancy as it may cost her a lot. As ill luck would have it, she had to give up her job as the Principal of the school. People came to know the real situation and she got no help in this adverse situation.

But Virmati was not prepared to surrender before the crucial circumstances of her life as she knew how to be hard and tough. Like Santiago, the hero of *The Old*

*Man and the Sea* she believed – ‘Man should be ready and bold as nobody knows when luck comes!’ She planned to move towards Tagore’s Shantiniketan where she may pursue her studies further. It was no use to cry over spilt milk. But Syed, a friend of Harish, entered her life and almost forced her to marry Harish. Now she had to share her house against her desires. But soon Ganga shifted to Kanpur. She gets Ida and yet there is no end of her worries.

With the success of *Difficult Daughters*, she felt confident and started writing *A Married Woman*. While studying the essays of Francis Bacon, she studied – ‘Wives are young men’s mistresses, companions for middle age and old man’s nurses’. This sentence created several questions in her mind such as – Is Bacon’s remark true even in this complex age of science and technology? Do women enjoy equal rights in every society? How do the rural women differ from urban women? What is the fate of uneducated women in joint family? Are Indian women getting all possible facilities for self-development and self-illumination? What are their responsibilities in the social set up as scenario has changed to a great extent? Are they getting love and respect from husband and children? Do the children change when they grow up? Are women free to have their own outlook in the field of religions? Are they supposed to accept the traditional belief of their parents and then in-laws?? Are they really free to choose their life partner? Who comes forward for their social security when husband deserts them? Are women satisfied and happy in childhood, youth and old age? Is marriage forced upon them in most of the cases? Is every woman prepared to be Sita, Draupadi, Shakuntala or Savitri?

In *A Married Woman*, she describes the miserable life of Astha who had to struggle for her existence since her childhood. Her middle class parents are highly worried about her marriage and future. Most of time, she finds herself in a helpless situation as she can’t break the existing social norms. Of course, she knows the limitations as well as realities of middle class family and hence gives consent for marriage with Hemant. After marriage she finds it difficult to adjust with her husband as he is not prepared to permit her any liberty in personal life. It is true that she gets a daughter and then a son. But these two children fail to provide any mental pleasure to her. Hemant expects that she should look after the family and children and do nothing else. Quite often Astha expresses the feelings of her heart in poems. She wants to be free in herself and mix up with other educated women as life within four walls of the house is dull and intolerable for her. At times, Manju Kapoor describes the manners and traditions of middle class people and the way Hindu ladies behave with their daughter-in-law. The frustration of Astha continues to increase with passage of time though she does not become hot tempered and peevish. She tries her best to

seek a way so as to fulfil her inner ambitions. Ultimately, she accepts the job of a school teacher so that she may communicate with others. Here she meets teachers of various subjects and teaches several students. Communication and expression provide her mental relief. But her creativity is not admired by Hemant and others. Mentally she still remains frustrated.

Aijaz Khan arranged a workshop The Street Theatre Groups and Astha attends it. Here her art is admired by Aijaz Kahn as he tries his level best to encourage her. It is proposed that Asitha will prepare a script on a play Bahari Masjid as she is quite creative and imaginative. She accepts the responsibility with delight and tries her level best to create harmony between reality and romance. As a matter of fact Astha is above narrow prejudices and communal feelings. From the depth of heart, she aspires for communal harmony among all the races of India. She asks – How can society survive if people quarrel in the name of caste, colour and creed? Her secular approach is admired by her colleagues and Aijaz Kha. After all, she understands her social responsibility and there can't be any carelessness on this issue. She is quite outspoken on the issue of secularism. Now she recollects that her father failed to relish paintings. Now, Hemant does not approve her poems. But Astha is not prepared to surrender before them. After all, Manju Kapoor asserts that a woman can't be a permanent victim of patriarchic system. The time has come for granting every liberty in every sphere. She was conscious of her free thoughts and hence aspired freedom mentally.

But the news of Aijaz's murder proves fatal for Astha. Her supporter had departed from her life and the question before her was – How to move forward? Yet she gathers all courage and controls her anguish. She takes part in the procession taken out to support communal harmony as she has firm views on theme of communal harmony. Ayodhya becomes the scene of action, full of artists, literary scholars and journalists etc. quite often she recollects Aijaz Khan in her leisure moments and yet remains staunch follower of Hindu-Muslim unity. She tries her level best to control her mental stress as she needs support like a pole.

Here Manju Kapoor describes the agonies of Astha in details. She fails to understand how to march further. Still she has interest in writing poems. Now her new companion is Pipeelika, the widow of Aijaz Khan. Both of them become intimate with each other and share their feelings and emotions without any hesitation. As they share the same bed, they develop physical relations with each other. But Pipeelika advises her to seek divorce from Hemant and this advice is not welcomed by Astha. This is the separation point between both of them and Pipeelika proceeds to get higher education abroad.

In an interview with K.K. Kathuria, former Professor and Chairman, Department of English, Kurukshetra University, Kurukshetra, I was told by him that Manju Kapoor's basic focus is on the family problems of middle class people who wish to fulfil their ambitions with hard work. Being a woman, Manju Kapoor observes different kinds of women – dull, active, rational, irrational, ambitious, intelligent, aspiring but not wicked like Shakespeare's Goneril, Regan or Lady Macbeth. At the same time, she does not paint innocent women like Miranda who have not seen group of men at one place and at one place exclaiming : Brave New World! The struggles of her women are new and they wish to survive in the age of cut-throat competition. She analyzes the conscious, sub-conscious and unconscious psychology of her characters so as to paint them in natural colours. Professor Kathuria told me that Manju Kapoor concentrates upon the theme of marriage as most of the mothers aspire for the marriage of their daughters in a prosperous family with bright future. Like Jane Austen, she believes that elopement spoils the reputation of the family and disturbs social discipline. Quite often she is frank while discussing the sexual affairs of her people. However, as a College Professor she attaches due importance to the education of women. As a follower of Henry Fielding, Charles Dickens, W.M. Thackeray etc. she deals with social-economic and political problems and does not survive in the utopian world. (Interview dated 5<sup>th</sup> November, 2016).

#### **REFERENCE**

1. Interview with *Prof. K.K. Kathuria on 5<sup>th</sup> November, 2016.*